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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2017  
TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: HOLGUIN BISHOP SAYS SITUATION IN EASTERN CUBA IS  
CONSTANTLY CHANGING

REF: A. (A) HAVANA 136  
[1](#)B. (B) HAVANA 1018

Classified By: COM: M.E. Parmly : For reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On 18 February, Monsignor Emilio Aranguren, Bishop of Holguin, described the situation in Eastern Cuba as in constant flux. He expressed that unlike in Western Cuba, where a great deal of the opposition is well organized with specific goals, in Eastern Cuba people react to events. He described violence and deaths erupting from a recent series of evictions. He received information from a Colonel in the Armed Forces that there was an effort to use such events to force out the First Secretary of the Province. The internal conflicts within the government combined with an increasing tendency of individuals to demonstrate dissatisfaction is creating an increasingly fluid situation. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Monsignor Emilio Aranguren during a discussion on 18 February with COM and Pol off stated that in looking at the situation in Eastern Cuba one can only use the gerund form of verbs; everything is evolving constantly and things are changing rapidly. He stated that in the Western part of Cuba there are many highly organized opposition groups, but in the East people simply react to events. These reactions can be dramatic and unexpected. He said that this was an area of the worst rural poverty in the country, where many households lack electricity and an adequate water supply. Much of the population is consumed in a daily struggle to survive and discontent is rife.

[1](#)2. (C) Monsignor Aranguren illustrated his point by describing heavily resisted evictions that occurred at the end of January (see Reftel). These involved people who were squatters in abandoned houses and persons who had constructed their own makeshift dwellings in a neighborhood known as El Piti on the outskirts of Holguin. He said that he had tried his best to stave off the evictions during the Holiday season. He stated that the government originally wanted to remove 26 households and in their first attempts were met with heavy resistance. Eventually the government entered in force and evicted six families, and demolished their homes. Aranguren stated that there were five deaths during the

confrontations. He said that one woman killed a police officer when she struck him in the throat with a metal pole. He said that there was also a case of suicide of one of the residents and another died of a heart attack during the evictions.

¶3. (C) Aranguren described a conversation that he had with a Colonel in the Armed Forces who stated that there was a concerted effort by some members of the government to use incidents such as these highly confrontational evictions to force out the First Secretary of the Province.

¶4. (C) He also talked about how one of his parishioners who is a University student in Santiago de Cuba in the Autumn blocked the car of the University Director, known to be a militant Communist, to protest the security situation on campus after the rape of a student. These events sparked a prolonged protest by about 200 students. Aranguren gave this as a further illustration as to how individuals are increasingly willing to take dramatic action. This student was later subject to disciplinary measures.

¶5. (C) Comment: Aranguren describes a very fluid situation of popular dissatisfaction with living conditions combined with an intense internal government struggle where one faction is willing to take advantage of highly risky events to put pressure on specific officials. A recent incident where a student at the College of Computer Science sharply questioned Ricardo de Alarcon, President of the Cuban National Assembly, has been interpreted by some Cubans as a sign that Cubans are more willing to speak up and by others as a manipulation of events to embarrass a high government official. Factors are combining that could lead to protests being ignited rapidly with unexpected intensity.

PARMLY